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ABSTRACT

In an effort to verify that the library research skills that comprise the library media instructional program at the Columbus (Ohio) School for Girls are those that college librarians would regard as essential, a questionnaire was mailed in February 1987 to the undergraduate libraries of 142 colleges and universities most often attended by graduates of this secondary school or known to have especially strong undergraduate bibliographic instruction programs. The response rate was 62.7%. The responses to 13 of the 16 questions on the survey are discussed in this paper. These particular questions were selected for their broad subjectivity and wide implications for high school librarians in terms of bearing most directly on the issue of transition to college (e.g., most significant resources, additional resources, problems of freshmen, basic proficiencies, and articulation and cooperation). Two major inadequacies are identified in the concluding discussion: the lack of established, articulated standards for the preparation of college-bound students; and the lack of a requirement for proficiency in research and information skills in either the high school curriculum or the college admission process. Emphasizing the importance of bibliographic instruction in high school, the paper suggests two remedies for the above named deficiencies: the inclusion of information/literacy skills in the criteria for college admissions, and the testing of incoming freshmen in these skills as part of the English placement exam. (10 references) (CGD)

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DESPERATELY SEEKING STANDARDS

Creating Competent College-Bound Library Users

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DESPERATELY SEEKING STANDARDS:

Creating Competent College-Bound Library Users

Susan Altan
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INTRODUCTION

The literature of woe and complaint is voluminous. Academic librarians want freshmen who can, bibliographically speaking, hit the ground running, and they wonder, in print, just what it is that we secondary school librarians are doing with those kids before they enter college.

In 1980, Mary Biggs' excellent article challenged high school librarians to offer course-related instruction, and suggested basic concepts, skills, and sources.(1) Later, in 1981, the frustrations of college and university librarians found plaintive expression in Library Journal: "Whatever, if anything, is being done now by way of library user education in the nation's school systems, it is clearly inadequate."(2)

Education for the transition from high school to college library is a subject of such high interest that the eleventh annual Library Instruction Conference in 1981 was devoted to it.(3) The use of academic libraries by high school students as a part of that transition is also a topic of high interest, and was recently surveyed comprehensively by Kathleen Craver in RQ. Two of Craver's conclusions are of particular interest: She noted that, "Most of the articles describing the benefits of academic library/school library

cooperation are marked by an absence of articulated bibliographic instruction between these libraries." Secondly, she concluded that, "Academic and school librarians need to formulate joint standards for library assignments, identify acceptable levels of library/research proficiencies, and decide at which grade levels to introduce them."(4)

SEARCHING FOR STANDARDS

In the mid-1980's, the Ohio Library Association, the Ohio Educational Library Media Association, and the Academic Library Association of Ohio sponsored a joint task force on library instruction, specifically on the transition from high school to college. Their report, Primed for Success, was submitted to the Ohio Library Association in June, 1986.(5) As in other publications, the responsibility of the secondary school librarian to prepare students for college is reaffirmed, but there is no delineation of universal standards that would clearly define the most effective preparation for college-bound students. Authors frequently cite the use of reference books, for example, as a valuable research concept, but specific tools that would be of use to freshmen or undergraduates are rarely enumerated. Since research concepts are not taught only in the abstract, but are presented through the use of particular titles, it would seem wise in teaching to use as examples those resources that will be the most useful in college and throughout adult life.

THE SURVEY

In an effort to verify that the library research skills which comprise our instruction program are actually those that college librarians would regard as essential, a questionnaire was mailed in February, 1987, to the undergraduate libraries of 142 colleges and universities that are most often attended by our graduates, or that are known to have especially strong undergraduate bibliographic instruction programs. Eighty-nine responses were received, which is a return rate of 62.7%. (This very high return rate once again demonstrates the unusual professional dedication of librarians and their exceptional willingness to share their expertise.)

This paper will discuss thirteen of the sixteen questions included in the survey. These thirteen were chosen for their broad subjectivity as well as for their wide implications for high school librarians in bearing most directly on the issue of transition to college. Not every respondent answered each question; therefore, the sample changes from question to question and is so noted. In some cases, respondents offered more than one answer, so the percentages when added do not always equal 100. For each question, only the numerically significant responses are given. The number in parentheses represents the raw score.

Most Significant Resources

Q: Based on your experience working with freshmen and undergraduates in general, which library resources are most important? Please name specific indexes, reference works, etc.

N (number of respondents) = 84; in response to this question, 84 respondents cited a total of 106 resources.

47% (39) Readers Guide
39% (33) Social Science Index
36% (30) The catalog
33% (28) Statistical Abstract
33% (28) New York Times Index
29% (24) General encyclopedias
25% (21) Humanities Index
23% (19) Almanacs
23% (19) Wilson Indexes unspecified
21% (18) PAIS

Q: To which single reference source do you turn most often in assisting undergraduate students? Why?

N = 71; a total of 18 resources were cited.

45% (32) The catalog and LCSH
29.5% (21) Readers Guide

Note: 70% of the respondents cited titles related to current periodicals.

Q: Which journal indexes are used most frequently by undergraduates?

N = 85; 37 titles were cited.

67% (57) Social Science Index
66% (56) Readers Guide
40% (34) Humanities Index
34% (29) PAIS
26% (22) Business Periodicals Index
22% (19) Education Index
21% (18) Psychology Abstracts
18% (15) General Science Index
14% (12) Wilson Indexes unspecified
13% (11) MLA Bibliography

These three questions, taken as a whole, have both collection development and bibliographic instruction implications for high school librarians. Clearly, students need to become very familiar with the use of current periodicals and their indexes, and need, as well, some exposure to the concept of scholarly journals before reaching college. They need to know that a wide range of

highly specialized subject indexes exists, and they need some opportunities to practice using these tools, particularly Social Science Index, the addition of which should be considered even though the the journals it covers are generally unavailable in secondary school libraries.

Prerequisite to greater use of more sophisticated periodical resources, however, are teachers who recognize the importance of integrating library research into their courses and who are willing to work with librarians in course-related instruction programs. As Joyce Merriam noted in her 1979 study of library instruction programs in Massachusetts secondary schools, opportunities for learning were missed "because literature searching was not sufficiently integrated with the course curriculum at most schools to make mastery of basic library skills seem relevant to more than small numbers of students."(6)

Additional Resources

In addition to the sections relating to periodicals, the survey included questions concerning other commonly used resources:

Q: Do undergraduates continue to use general encyclopedias? If yes, which do you recommend?

N = 84; 7 titles were cited. 95% (80) of the respondents cited continuing use of general encyclopedias by undergraduates. Recommended titles:

79% (66) Encyclopaedia Britannica
68% (57) Encyclopedia Americana
43% (36) Academic American Encyclopedia
31% (26) World Book Encyclopedia
19% (16) Colliers Encyclopedia

Q: Is the New York Times Index the most frequently used newspaper index? Which others, if any, are used by undergraduates?

N = 81; 83% (67) of respondents answered yes; 15% (12) stated that there is more use of the National Newspaper Index.

In addition to the New York Times Index, a total of 13 other news indexes were cited:

47% (38) Wall Street Journal	12% (10) Washington Post
41% (33) National Newspaper Index	11% (9) Newsbank
23% (19) Indexes to local papers	11% (9) Christian Science Monitor
20% (16) London Times	

Responses to this question point to the growing importance of the Information Access Company's National Newspaper Index covering five major newspapers, 4 of which are mentioned above.

Q: Do you expect entering students to be familiar with data base searching? Which vendor and data bases are most useful in working with undergraduates?

N = 83; 99% (82) do not expect familiarity with data base searching.

Of the 53 respondents who cited a vendor, 74% (39) cited DIALOG; 38% (20) cited BRS or BRS After Dark; 26% (14) cited Wilsonline.

Although college librarians' expectations regarding data base searching are very low, the DIALOG company is enticing a growing number of school libraries into this area through its bargain priced Classmate program. The fact that the National Newspaper Index is one of the on-line data bases available through Classmate, means that even the smallest high school libraries can afford to include it in their instructional programs.

Problems of Freshmen

One survey question that provoked an outpouring of anguished commentary was the following:

Q: What are the greatest problems that freshmen have in the library?

N = 87; responses were grouped into twelve problem areas.

34% (30) Do not understand the library as an institution.
34% (30) Problems related to periodicals.
33% (29) Thinking problems.
32% (28) Fear and loathing.
32% (28) Problems related to the catalog.
29% (25) Problems related to basic skills.
23% (20) Overwhelmed by the research process.
22% (19) Problems related to the classification system.

The following paragraphs summarize the nature of the responses in each of these categories and include direct, although anonymous, quotes from the respondents.

34% Do not understand the library as an institution.

Freshmen have no concept of library organization, or of the distinction between primary/secondary or popular/ scholarly sources. They also have no concept of the vast

array of resources available; they are unaccustomed to using libraries, are unaware of the librarian as a resource, and are unaware of their own lack of knowledge. They fail to "realize that the Reader's Guide is not an appropriate resource for much of the research they will do."

34% Problems related to periodicals.

Freshmen cannot read citations, cannot identify or locate periodicals dispersed throughout the collection, and cannot use a union list of serials.

33% Thinking problems.

Freshmen have no idea how to start; they cannot conceptualize a topic, formulate a research problem, narrow a topic, ask an appropriate question, or see the relevance of a resource to a topic. They "don't know what questions to ask (Where is the Reader's Guide, rather than where would I find articles on [subject]." They do not know "how to analyze their needs or assignments so that they are then able to ask appropriate questions or proceed to the appropriate resources."

32% Fear and loathing.

Freshmen are bewildered by the size and complexity of both the physical building and the collection. They feel dumb, are afraid or too embarrassed to ask questions, and cannot read directional maps. They suffer from "fear and anxiety. They do not have adequate library skills and they are afraid to admit this." "Most have no confidence in

themselves. Most do not think of themselves as being logical. Many will not approach the reference librarian on duty or ask a question of the circulation staff. They think their own questions are 'stupid'. Our entire reference staff is constantly combatting their lack of self-esteem and lack of preparation." Their greatest problem is "fear and loathing. They expect to be rebuffed, abused and trod upon, especially if they 'bother' us by asking a 'stupid' question. We have to do a lot of attitude adjustment so that they realize we're really here to help them succeed and that we like to do so." "They have basic fears of getting lost both within the building and within the bibliographic apparatus. One of our basic concerns in instruction therefore is to make them aware of the librarians as friendly, accessible resource people."

32% Problems related to the catalog.

Freshmen lack card reading skills, have difficulties understanding subject headings, and have particular problems with LCSH and the concept of controlled vocabulary.

29% Problems related to basic skills.

Freshmen lack familiarity with basic skills, reference sources, and the organization of information into disciplines. They do not understand the difference between a book and a journal, and cannot articulate a simple search strategy.

23% Overwhelmed by the research process.

Freshmen lack persistence, follow-through and flexibility. They want everything in one source and give up after the first try. They procrastinate and find research too time consuming. They are "unwilling to spend the necessary time to do the literature searches -- want one 'thing' that tells them just what they want to know. They need to realize how time consuming library work is." "Most students just accept whatever falls off the shelf... students need to understand that research is not always a straight line with guide posts. Sometimes it's a maze, sometimes you guess about where to look, but you don't quit just because it isn't in the first place you look. To be fair to students, they often face impossible, incompetent assignments from faculty who should (but apparently don't) know any better."

22% Problems related to the classification system.

Freshmen do not understand the Library of Congress system, cannot read LC call numbers, and cannot locate items on the shelves.

A number of these problems were noted by Merriam in her comments on the difficulties experienced by students upon entering the university.(7) It does not appear, nearly ten years later, that we have made much progress.

Basic Proficiencies

Q: What are your expectations (or desires) regarding freshmen abilities to use a library?

N = 87; 25 separate skills were defined as expected or desired.

61% (53) Understand the purpose and use of a periodical index, including the parts of a citation.
57% (50) Understand the purpose and use of the catalog, including how to read the parts of a card or an on-line citation.
39% (34) Display certain positive attitudes such as an open mind, curiosity, persistance, and a desire to learn. 29% (25) of the 87 respondents wished that freshmen would display a willingness to ask for help before reaching the desperation level.
18% (16) Understand the concept of controlled vocabulary.
17% (15) Expect very little or nothing.
16% (14) Understand the concept of a classification system and its relation to the location of books on the shelves.
15% (13) Know how to use some basic reference sources.
14% (12) Be able to formulate a search strategy.
14% (12) Recognize various types of information sources.

These are reasonable expectations and well within the scope of the traditional high school curriculum. It is of the greatest importance that secondary school library instruction focus on research concepts illustrated through a few specific tools, rather than on the tools themselves without an accompanying understanding of the strategies for bibliographic control. One librarian, in response to this question, commented, "Most new students, irrespective of preparatory institution, find the following to be especially difficult to grasp. First is the concept of reference works. Once students understand how encyclopedias, bibliographies, and -- especially -- serial bibliographies enable them to find information efficiently, they can proceed confidently with any library research. It is knowledge of the type of tool, not specific tools, that matters. At the same time, understanding the reference librarian's role complements

that knowledge. We emphasize that we are human resources, available to students and faculty."

The ability to construct a search strategy is fundamental to the research process; 75% of the respondents described using a strategy that builds from general to specific resources:

Q: Please describe the type of search strategy that you use with undergraduates. If you do not use the concept of a search strategy, describe the organization of your instruction.

N = 82.

59% (48) Described a 3 to 4 step process: survey articles, catalog, periodical indexes, other sources (reference works, bibliographies, goverment documents.)
An additional 16% (13) described their process as general to particular or simple to complex, without further specification; it is possible that this is essentially the same answer stated in another way.
22% (18) Individual attention; method varies with the subject, the course, or the length of the paper.
2% (2) Deductive method: trace references from bibliographies or suggested reading lists.
1% (1) Chronological method: recent to historical materials.

Q: In your experience, for what main purposes do undergraduates use the library?

N = 85; a total of 18 uses were cited.

71% (60) study	39% (33) short-term course related assignments
61% (52) research papers	
47% (40) reserve reading	33% (28) socialization ("face time")

Another question asked librarians if their catalogs were on-line or in card form. 60% of the respondents indicated that their catalogs were either on-line, on-line + a frozen card catalog, or on-line "soon" (in the conversion process or completed by a specified target date.) Twenty-one

months later, it must be assumed that the number has grown, and that school libraries preparing students for college need to consider automating as a part of that preparation process.

Articulation and Cooperation

Q: How are your expectations communicated to secondary school librarians?

N = 83.

66% (55) Expectations are not communicated.
17% (14) Through tours and classes for high school students; process is initiated by the high school teacher.
15% (12) This communication should be the responsibility of state or national professional organizations.
12% (10) Through personal contacts (visits, lectures, meetings) with local high school librarians.

Q: 1) Have you or any of the reference staff been on tours of area high school libraries? 2) Do local secondary librarians visit your facility?

1) N = 80. 79% (63) No; 16% (13) Yes; 5% (4) As a parent or for a meeting.
2) N = 81. 55% (45) No; 41% (33) Yes; 4% (3) Do not know.

Comments from respondents to these two questions were very positive for the most part. Many expressed a strong interest in articulation programs and in greater contact than now exists. A minority expressed reservations based upon space or time constraints, feeling that high school students are "in over their heads" in university libraries and thus unfairly monopolize time which should belong to college students.

One comment that appeared repeatedly was that librarians at colleges which draw nationally, rather than

regionally, would not benefit from visits to local schools. In my experience, talking with colleagues at state and national conferences, school library resources and programs do not vary greatly. Visits to the libraries of a few selected public and private secondary schools would keep academic librarians apprised of a typical student's background; if the practice were widespread, then the articulation we desire would occur regardless of the migratory patterns of freshmen.

Furthermore, it is a certainty that high school students are using academic libraries. Craver concluded, "The results of the studies undoubtedly increase our awareness that high school students have been and will continue to be users of academic libraries. They reveal a determination on the part of students to access academic library materials despite formidable institutional barriers."(8)

Librarians at those colleges and universities that do draw significant numbers of students from the local or regional community might regard this as an opportunity to engage in some long-term recruitment and development on behalf of their institutions. Angie LeClercq noted that the instigating force behind much of the successful high school/research library cooperation has been "...a recognition by colleges that many of these high school students are potential attendees at their own institutions. Thus the motive combines self-help (these students are

coming our way, let's train them in proper information-seeking techniques) -- and a public relations effort to attract the area's brightest students to attend the college."(9)

CONCLUSIONS

The lack of established, articulated standards for the preparation of college-bound students is certainly an obstacle to success, but there exists another obstacle of even greater consequence, and it is this: neither the high school curriculum nor the college admission process require proficiency in research and information skills. There are state and school graduation requirements in the various academic disciplines, and there are aptitude and achievement examinations for college entrance; but at no time are students required to display the most fundamental skill of finding information.

This means that bibliographic instruction in a secondary school is entirely dependent upon the enthusiasm and desire of an individual librarian to create a thoughtful, course-related program and to sell it to faculty who may be uninterested or who may not feel that they can spare precious class time for someone else's topic. A program that is dependent upon the assertive personality and faculty contacts of one individual is subject to disintegration with every change in the teaching staff, and most certainly will unravel upon the inevitable departure of

that person from the school. Such a program is neither stable, nor permanent, nor effective in the long run.

A remedy has been suggested, however, in the Ohio task force report, Primed for Success, which recommends the inclusion of information/literacy skills in the criteria for college admissions, and suggests that incoming freshmen be tested in these skills as a part of the English placement exam.(10)

When colleges and universities demand some proof of achievement in basic research skills as is required in mathematics or foreigh language or English, then academic librarians will see students who not only hit the ground running, but who are ready for the college marathon.

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